

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 6 SPRING 2016



MEASURE AA – FOR A HEALTHY BAY AND THRIVING WILDLIFE

BY ILANA DEBARE

Like many of us, you've probably walked the meadows and shores of Point Reyes and given silent thanks to the people who had the foresight to preserve so much wild and natural beauty. Now we have a chance to leave a similar natural legacy for future generations—through Measure AA, a parcel tax for tidal marsh restoration that will be on the June ballot in nine Bay Area counties.

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Snowy Plover with leg bands (for tracking) at Crown Beach in Alameda.

VOLUNTEERS WITH VISION CONSERVE OUR WILDLIFE

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our Alameda conservation committee, Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve (FAWR), launched an innovative program called *Wild in Alameda* this spring. They mounted a three-month photo exhibit (through May 28) at the Alameda Free Library focused on Alameda's wildlife cohort, which includes endangered and threatened species as well as other birds and mammals.

All the photographs were taken in Alameda by local shutterbugs, including our late Board Member Allen Hirsch, to whom the show is dedicated. Saturday, April 9

will be a very special day honoring Alameda's wildlife. In the morning, the library will host presentations by local biologists and citizen scientists with field insights on Alameda's Peregrine Falcons, Least Terns, Snowy Plovers, pelicans, egrets, and harbor seals. In the afternoon, we'll set up "viewing stations" around town so that the whole community can witness the amazing wildlife for themselves. Docents with spotting scopes will interpret the various species and encourage island residents to join with FAWR/GGAS in conserving local wildlife.

This ingenious multi-faceted initiative

was conceived and led by a dynamic duo: Leora Feeney and Linda Carloni, with strong involvement from the FAWR crew. Linda is a consummate pro who puts her competence to work in myriad ways—simultaneously! She's an enthusiastic volunteer for our Eco-Education program for low-income schoolchildren, co-teaches our popular Waterbirds class in autumn, helps organize our Birdathon, and shares her leadership prowess as the GGAS Board's Vice President.

Leora, meanwhile, is an indefatigable champion for Alameda's wildlife. She possesses vision, tenacity, and the uncanny ability to inspire everybody she meets, young and old alike. Our beloved Leora was inducted into the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame this spring for leading the arduous 20+-year battle by GGAS to secure the future of Alameda's tern colony through the establishment of a permanent wildlife reserve on federal land at Alameda Point. Christy Smith of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service calls Leora "the Godmother of the Terns," while Clay Anderson—a new Board member who spent an entire Saturday evening helping install the *Wild in Alameda* exhibit—refers to Leora as "the bees' knees."

These wonderful leaders aren't the only GGAS volunteers with exceptionally keen vision. Bob Lewis and Dave Quady, co-leaders of the historic 75th Oakland Christmas Bird Count, helped us surpass our own world record for the most field observers. They mustered 277 field observers for Oakland's 2015 CBC!

Mega-cheers for these truly visionary volunteers. They inspire us all!

NEWS BRIEFS

Docents at Lake Merritt

Explore the ducks, egrets, and nesting cormorants of Lake Merritt...with help from our friendly docents! GGAS volunteers will share scopes and info near the Rotary Nature Center on the lake's north shore from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays, April 9 and 16, May 14 and 21, and June 4.

Brown Pelican Survey – May 7

Brown Pelicans were removed from the Endangered Species list in 2009, but recent disastrous breeding seasons have put them at risk again. Audubon California is launching a biannual Brown Pelican survey. To help with this citizen-science count on May 7, contact Arianna at arickard@audubon.org.

GGNRA dog management

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area recently proposed new dog management rules that would set aside more areas that are off-limits to dogs, which will benefit birds and wildlife. Please support this policy change by writing a letter before May 25th. Details at <http://goldengateaudubon.org/ggnra-dogs>.

Good year for SF Snowy Plovers

This winter saw a record number of Snowy Plovers at Ocean Beach—104 sighted in a single day. This is good news about this tiny, threatened shorebird, and a testament to years of work by GGAS members monitoring and restoring habitat for San Francisco plovers.



Dereck Love

MITCHELL CANYON

BY STEVE AND CAROL LOMBARDI

LOCATION

Clayton
Contra Costa
County

*The
canyon is
spectacular
in the
spring.*

The north slope of Mt. Diablo near Clayton offers one of the best birding spots in the East Bay. Mitchell Canyon is a shady, steep-sided, north-facing canyon with varied habitat and more-or-less permanent water. It provides easy access to both the casual stroller and the serious hiker/biker/equestrian. (Birding by horse? Now, there's a concept.)

The canyon is a delightful place to bird year-round, but becomes spectacular from late April to early May. This is when migrant warblers, flycatchers, and others make brief visits on the way to their summer breeding grounds. And the canyon's resident breeders show up and make themselves known with their songs.

While you're there, don't spend all your time looking up into the canopy. Be sure to enjoy the plethora of spring-blooming wildflowers alongside the trail. The canyon is one of the best places to see the Mt. Diablo globe lily (*Calochortus pulchellus Benth.*), among many other wildflowers.



Joe Saba

(Left) Hiking in Mitchell Canyon; (above) Lazuli Bunting.

Mitchell Canyon today exists as a park thanks to the efforts of the Save Mt. Diablo organization. Prior to SMD's formation in 1971, the state park consisted only of the peak of Mt. Diablo. The surrounding lowlands were all private ranchlands or recreation facilities. SMD's efforts made Mitchell Canyon, nearby Donner Canyon, and adjacent areas part of the park in the mid-1970s. What was initially a 7,788-acre park has grown into more than 110,000 acres (172 square miles) of parkland.

Because of the canyon's steep sides and deep shade, the area provides several different habitat types. Pine-oak woodland, riparian, grassland, chaparral, and sage scrub are all accessible in a relatively short walk.

One nice loop hike takes you from the visitor center uphill on Mitchell Canyon Road, then back on Red Road and Globe Lily Trail. At the parking lot, check the oaks for breeders like White-breasted Nuthatch. Along the trail, watch the canopy for warblers, empids, and vireos.

As the habitat becomes riparian, you may find Orange-crowned Warblers nesting in the willows. The chaparral-covered canyon walls are close enough that you should be able to hear California Thrasher, Wrentit, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

The trail steepens at signpost 10. The next stretch is good for summer-breeding Cassin's Vireo, Warbling Vireo, and Lazuli Bunting. After a quarter-mile, you'll find a shaded picnic table—a good spot for a rest and a snack before starting your return.

GGAS will sponsor a field trip to Mitchell Canyon on Saturday, May 7. See goldengateaudubon.org/fieldtrips for details on this and all our other trips.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

SPRING BRINGS MIGRANTS... AND BIRDATHONNERS

BY ILANA DEBARE

April is the peak of spring migration...and the peak of Birdathon fun! Birdathon is our largest and most exciting fundraising event of the year. Participants choose from over 20 special field trips throughout the month of April, including exclusive behind-the-scenes tours and a full-day Birds and Wine in Sonoma County trip. Then, like a walkathon, they get friends to sponsor them with tax-deductible contributions to Golden Gate Audubon.

This year, our goal is \$60,000 to support our conservation and environmental education programs. And with volunteers like Dan Harris, we're optimistic we'll reach it. Dan, a retired environmental planner for the federal government, started birding about seven years ago. Last year he was our top Birdathon fundraiser...raising \$2,526 from a whopping 106 friends and family members!

Birdathon fundraising isn't as hard as it might seem, according to Dan. If you share your personal passion for birds and Audubon, friends will be honored and excited to support you.

"I was somewhat apprehensive at first asking family and friends for money," Dan recalled, "but was pleasantly surprised, overwhelmed, and humbled by the tremendous support received from so many people."

Dan sees Birdathon as a way to give back for all the pleasure and knowledge he's gained through GGAS.

"Golden Gate Audubon allows me to learn more about birds and about protecting their habitat," he said. "There are so many classes, so many field trips with knowledgeable leaders. Plus, I've met so many nice people."

It's not too late to sign up for a trip and support Birdathon! This year's trips include:

- Behind the Scenes at the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration
- Birding Boot Camp
- Birds & Wine in Sonoma County
- Point Reyes Lighthouse Area
- Birding the Island of Alameda
- Audubon Canyon Ranch



Ilana DeBare

Birdathon 2015 trip at Coyote Hills Regional Park.

If you prefer not to fundraise, you may sign up for a trip and make a tax-deductible contribution yourself. Then join us for the fun Birdathon Awards Celebration on Sunday, May 15, a casual garden party in the Oakland Hills. This year we're adding a new prize—a \$1,000 pair of Pentax binoculars—for the top *first-time* Birdathon fundraiser. Might that be you?

For a list of trips and other Birdathon information, please visit goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon.

BIRDATHON AWARDS CELEBRATION

Oakland

Sunday, May 15, 3 to 6 p.m.

Whether or not you go on a Birdathon trip, join us for an afternoon celebrating the beauty of birds. Mingle with birding friends while enjoying gourmet appetizers and wine. Visit with live raptors from Native Bird Connections, view bird prints and paintings by David Tomb, and try out new binoculars from Woodland Hills Camera & Telescopes...all at a stunning home in the Oakland Hills. See goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2016-celebration for details and tickets.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Return of the Terns Crab Cove, Alameda Saturday, June 18

The one opportunity each year to view the nesting colony of endangered California Least Terns at Alameda Point! Guided bus tour, presentations on the terns, plus shoreline birding. Advance registration required through East Bay Regional Park District at goldengateaudubon.org/tern-register. Or see our website for more info.

Wild! In Alameda Alameda Main Library Saturday, April 9, 10 a.m. to noon

Come to GGAS's free symposium with slides and natural history about Ospreys, Brown Pelicans, and other Alameda wildlife. Advance registration required at goldengateaudubon.org/wild-alameda. Or visit our wildlife photography exhibit at the Alameda Main Library (1550 Oak Street in Alameda) anytime through May 28.

Volunteer Picnic Golden Gate Park, San Francisco Saturday, June 25, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Calling all of our habitat restoration volunteers, field trip leaders, docents, Eco-Ed helpers, conservation committee members, and others! Join us for a fun picnic lunch as we celebrate and thank you and other dedicated Golden Gate Audubon volunteers. RSVP required to nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org.

MEASURE AA CONTINUED from page 1

Measure AA, known as the *Clean and Healthy Bay* ballot measure, would raise \$500 million for wetlands restoration over the next twenty years through a \$12-per-year parcel tax.

That's less than four cents per day to restore some of the natural Bay shoreline lost during 150 years of urban development. Meanwhile, passage of Measure AA would leverage additional millions in state and federal funding.

Together these monies could restore tens of thousands of acres of tidal marsh—creating essential habitat for millions of migratory and resident birds, cleaner water, a natural buffer against sea level rise, and new opportunities for public education and recreation along the shoreline.

"Measure AA is our generation's biggest single opportunity to ensure a healthy future for Bay Area waterbirds and shorebirds," said GGAS Executive Director Cindy Margulis. "As Audubon members, we know better than anybody the importance of thriving wetlands. I hope that all GGAS members will take the lead in telling their friends and neighbors to support Measure AA."

San Francisco Bay is more than a spot of inspirational local beauty: It is the largest estuary on the West Coast and a critical stop along the Pacific Flyway migration route, drawing over a million shorebirds and waterfowl each year.



Red-winged Blackbirds at Coyote Hills.

Rick Lewis



Ridgway's Rails like this pair will benefit from restored wetlands.

Wetlands restored by Measure AA will help filter contaminants from the Bay and provide a natural buffer against sea level rise.

But the Bay's shores are only a shadow of their former self. From 200,000 acres of tidal marsh before the Gold Rush, only about 45,000 acres are left.

The good news is that about 35,000 shoreline acres—such as former industrial salt ponds—have already been acquired by conservation groups and government agencies and are awaiting restoration. Measure AA would provide funding to turn them into vital habitat for species such as herons, shorebirds, ducks, terns, and endangered Ridgway's Rails.

Here's how it will work. The *San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority* board, made up of local elected officials, will approve grants for specific projects in four areas:

- Clean water and pollution prevention.
- Fish, bird, and wildlife habitat.
- Integrated flood protection.
- Shoreline public access.

Projects will be prioritized based on their long-term benefit to the Bay as a whole, with provisions to ensure that all nine Bay counties are included. The

Authority's list of possible projects includes some very large ones such as restoration of 15,000 acres of former salt ponds in the South Bay, but also smaller ones that would be familiar to many Audubon members. For instance, it could provide funding for GGAS's restoration work at Pier 94 in San Francisco; trash clean-up at the terribly littered creek mouths along San Leandro Bay in Oakland; shoreline restoration and trails near the Least Tern colony at Alameda Point; improvement of Ridgway's Rail habitat in North Richmond; and restoration of a native oyster reef managed by Audubon California at Arambaru Island in Marin. The Authority will get input about projects from a citizens' advisory committee that includes representatives of business, labor, and conservation groups, including Arthur Feinstein from the Sierra Club and David Lewis from Save the Bay.

To pass, Measure AA needs the approval of more than 2/3 of voters in the nine Bay Area counties in the June 7 election. Want to help? See peopleforacleanandhealthybay.org. Then tell your friends and neighbors why they should vote "AA for the Bay!"



John Van de Graaff

CALIFORNIA BIRDS AND GLOBAL WARMING

ANDREA JONES

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, April 21
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

How will California birds be affected by climate change? Recent research by the National Audubon Society on North American birds and climate change is helping us predict what could happen to the ranges of California species such as Western Grebe, Clark's Grebe, Black Oystercatcher, Long-billed Curlew, Allen's Hummingbird, and Yellow-billed Magpie. Andrea Jones, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon California, will share what the models tell us, how Audubon is using this research to guide its statewide conservation work, and what we all can do to help California birds survive as changes come to both climate and habitat.

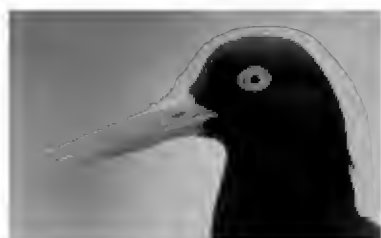
CALIFORNIA BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS

ANNA WEINSTEIN

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, May 19
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

Black Oystercatchers are among the most charismatic and easily identifiable residents of our rocky intertidal coastline. But with less than 20,000 individuals left worldwide, their future is uncertain. Audubon chapter members from Mendocino to Monterey (including Golden Gate Audubon!) are taking part in population surveys that shed light on the natural history of this species, from its preferred foods to how it responds to predators. Anna Weinstein, marine program director at Audubon California, will update you on this inspiring citizen-science effort and explain what is being done to protect Black Oystercatchers in a rapidly changing coastal world.



Peter Seubert

SUNDA – LAND OF BIRDS, BEASTS AND DRAGONS

BOB LEWIS

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, June 16
6:00 p.m. Annual Meeting
and refreshments
7 p.m. program

Twenty thousand years ago, the lands that make up Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore were interconnected in an area geologists call Sunda. As glaciers melted and the sea level rose, islands like Borneo, Bali, and Komodo were separated from the Asian mainland. Alfred Russel Wallace explored this area in the 19th century when he independently developed the concept of evolution by natural selection made famous by Darwin. Learn about the avian families of the area, along with some of the other forest creatures living there, the importance of islands to evolution, and the impact of the palm oil industry on tropical forests.

Bob Lewis, chair of GGAS's Adult Education Committee, has taught birding classes for over 20 years. An award-winning bird photographer with a life list of over 4,500 species, he is the recipient of the 2016 Chandler Robbins Education/Conservation Award from the American Birding Association. The ABA will present Bob with the award at our Annual Meeting, immediately preceding Bob's talk.



Bob Lewis

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

2016 GGAS ANNUAL MEETING

You are invited!

Golden Gate Audubon Society will hold our annual membership meeting on Thursday, June 16, at 6 p.m., immediately prior to the Speaker Series in Berkeley. Join us to hear the latest on our conservation activities and plans for GGAS's centennial year in 2017! Share your ideas. Enjoy some snacks. Then stay for Bob Lewis's talk.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous support of our many conservation, education, and habitat restoration activities!

Donations from December 1, 2015 through February 29, 2016

GOLDEN EAGLE (\$1000 and above)

Carol Baxter, Mary Betlach, Alan Harper & Carol Baird, EarthShare California, Katherine Erickson, Clara Gerdes, Harold Kirker, Miles & Mel McKey, John Nelson, Kelly Purcell, Karen Rosenbaum & Ben McClinton, Tulsa & Simone Fund, Uplands Family Foundation

PEREGRINE FALCON (\$500 to \$999)

Rubi Abrams, June Browne, Carson Cox, Carol Donohoe, East Bay Zoological Society, Catherine Elliott, Emergency Management & Safety Solutions, Lisa Esherick, Jane Freeman, Bob Hallet, William Hudson, Douglas Hendricks & Patricia Langenhahn, Diane Luders, Jeanne McHugh, Tara O’Brien, Sarah Peterman-Bell, Phil Price, Kuppe Shankar, Trillium Asset Management LLC

LEAST TERN (\$250 to \$499)

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RIDGWAY’S RAIL (\$100 to \$249)

Eric Anderson, Mark Anderson, Drue Ashford, Diana Austin, Patricia Bacchetti, Cyndi Bakir, Max Benningfield, Mary Bennion, George Bing, Robert Blumberg, Richard & Liz Bordow, Claire & Bill Bove, Patricia Bowen, Ellen & Russell Breslauer, Shelagh Brodersen, Joan Carroll, Gayle Cerri, George Chrisman, Courtney Clarkson, Cindy Cobb, Thomas Colton, Hugh Cotter,

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GIFTS (To \$99)

Lisa Aaron, Marilyn Abers, Rachel Ahrens, Ralph Alcorn, Karim Al-Khafaji, Sharon Anderegg, Jane Anfinson, Kathy Araujo, Tony Arjo, Jane Armstrong, Sharon Arnold, Williams Atkins,

Jennifer Ayres, Stacy Baar, William Backer, Diane Bahr, Chris & Gary Bard, Sandra Barth, Susan Battersby, Sharon Beals, Levon Bedrossian, Janet Beeler, Bruce Bell, Grant Bennett, Walter Berger, Anna Bergman-Hill, Jody Berke, Jack Bertges, Eric Biber, Daniel Bickley, Adela Bishop, Jan Blumenkrantz, Karen Bodine, Jonathan Bond, Larissa Bordere, Jennifer Braun, Margaret Bray, John Brenneman, Lucille Breslow, Lisa Brinner, Bonnie Brown, Crystal Brunzell, Anne Buchanan, Maryellen Buckley, Arden Bucklin, Barbara Bull, Deborah Bullock, Jacqueline Burke, Melody Burns, Barbara Busch, Karen Butterfield, Wendy Caesar, California Wildlife Foundation, Virginia Carder, Elaine Caret, Linda & Bob Carloni, Mike & Jane Carnall, Betty Carson, Alison Cheung, Claire Chow, Maggie Clark, Kathleen Clarkson, Terry Coddington, Ruthann Conway, Rosemary Corbin, Robert Craft, Nancy Crisona, John Cunkle, Sylvia Darr, Lydia Day, Barbara Quinn De Pinto, Barbara Dean, Adrienne DeBisschop, William DeVore, Julianna Dickey, William Dodge, Mary Donovan, Benett Dubiner, Seth Dunten, B. Duplenne, Beverly Edge, Roy Egawa, Jacqueline & George Ellinwood, Walter Ems, Nancy Fee, Roland Feller, Ayda Lucero Fleck, Tina Fletcher, Catherine Fox, Dorothy Frantz, Sue Free, Leslie Friedman, Patricia Gannon, Susan George, William Giddens, Susan Goddard, Deborah Gomez, Paul Greenberg, Suzanne Greva, George Griffeth, Catherine Gross, Paul Grunland, Vicki Gutgesell, Amy Halio, Christine Hall, Margaret Hangan, Joyce Hawley, Marlene Hellman, James Herre, Leah Hess, Miriam Hiser, Anne Hoff, William Hoffland, Patricia Hoffman, Otto Holz, Elizabeth Hook, Leonard Horwitz, Georgiana Horwitz, Robert Hosemann, Genevieve Howe, Timothy G. Howe, Joan Hughes, Bill & Michele Hunnewell, Andrew & Barbara Imbrie,

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Peter Caldwell, in honor of Dan Murphy
Mary & Charles DeBare, in honor of Ilana DeBare
Yvonne Jacobs, in honor of Marsha Lohden
Victor Latham, in honor of Raquel Latham
Brae McVoy, in honor of Holly A. Bacuzzi

GIFTS IN MEMORY OF

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Rita Hays, in memory of Dick & Claire Johnson
Rich & Terry Horrigan, in memory of Rich Stallcup
Deborah Hurst, in memory of Frances Hurst
Dan & Joan Murphy, in memory of Albert Hopkins
David Robinson, in memory of Dr. Herman Robinson
Nancy Slocum, in memory of Dr. Julia Wieters Slocum
Leslee Stein, in memory of Mary Breunig
Halcyon Teed, in memory of Evelyn Stafford Teed

In memory of GGAS Board Member Allen Hirsch:

Melissa Batavia, Phillip Burke, Francine Burnham, Mary Jo Cook, Gabrielle Essner, Harvard Business School Community Partners Envision Education, Jane & Barry Horn, Helen Hutchison & Lee Aurich, Diane & Rob Johnson, Mary Ann Kiely, Jane Larkin, Bill Magladry, Jill Martenson, Chris Martin, Laurie Nardone, Clark Osterhout, William Pottoff, Francine Prophet, Joanne Sarg Wallin, Alice Trinkl, Kristin Tutka, Kirsten Weisser & Joseph Tuman, John White

IN-KIND GIFTS

Jacqueline Craig, FarWest Sanitation & Storage, Maureen Lahiff, Port of San Francisco, Recology, Joanne Sarg Wallin

EMPLOYEE GIFT MATCHES

Recology (Stefanie Pavis Medious)
Chevron (Dawn Lemoine, Robert Lewis, Dave Quady,)
PricewaterhouseCoopers (Rohit Malkani)
Salesforce (Katy Henrickson)

GRANTS

California Natural Resources Agency

Selph, Susan Semonoff, Sue & Ric Shafer, John Shoptaw, Ruth Silva, Edith Simonson, Molly Singer, Barbara Sizelove, Gwendolyn Smith, Lois Smith, David Snippen, Katharine Snyder, Anne Sobol, Dina Solomon, Roger Spence, William Springer, Martha Stampfer, Joyce & James Stanek, Judy Stead, Myong Stebbins, Kim Steele, Bill Stewart, Kathy Stiles, Delmar Stipe, Lynn Strandberg, Deborah Stratmann, Bill Strobridge & Letty Wong, Tina Stromsted, Barbara

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THE GULL AND WEBSITE

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www.goldengateaudubon.org

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**3 Bay Area Hotspot:
Mitchell Canyon**

The north slope of Mt. Diablo offers some of the Bay Area's best spring birding.

4 Birdathon 2016 is here!

There's still time to sign up for great Birdathon trips to Point Reyes, Alameda, Sonoma wine country, and more.

6 Speaker Series:

California Birds and Global Warming

How we can help local species like Allen's Hummingbird respond to climate change

BACKYARD BIRDER



Mark Rauzon

Red-breasted Nuthatch.

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

BY BLAKE EDGAR

Listen for the string of tinny toots, a call that sounds like a toy horn or a truck's back-up warning alarm. Then locate a nearby conifer—perhaps a pine, Douglas fir, or redwood—and scan the trunk and limbs for a squat bird moving in a zigzag pattern. If the bird sports a black eye-line, white “eyebrow,” blue-gray wings, and rusty breast and belly, you’ve spotted a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Hopping up or down a trunk or along a branch, the Red-breasted Nuthatch pursues protein-rich insects and seeds by prying up pieces of bark or pulling apart cone scales. Its needle-like bill deftly grasps tiny prey or hammers open seeds that it has cached within bark crevices (hence the name “nuthatch”). Even without the bracing tail of a Brown Creeper, nuthatches are agile in their arboreal habitat.

Red-breasted Nuthatches visit the Bay Area in fall and winter. In some years, poor production of mountain conifer seeds sends more members of the species downslope from the Sierras to the Central Valley and toward the coast. In recent decades, Red-breasted Nuthatch has been a regular spring nester in the East Bay hills and Marin County.

Courtship commences when a male sings with drooped wings and cocked tail, swinging his rump like a pendulum before a female. Males may also take flight or initiate nest holes in attempts to attract a female. Breeding occurs between April and August.

Once paired up, the male and female complete a nest hole in a snag or rotting limb. Unlike better-equipped woodpeckers, nuthatches need dead or decayed wood for their bills to be able to excavate effectively. After a cavity has been dug out to a depth up to eight inches, the female gathers grass, moss, fur, feathers, and bits of bark to line the nest. Uniquely, Red-breasted Nuthatches “paint” around the inch-diameter entry hole with sticky pitch, perhaps to deter rodent or avian predators. About a half dozen eggs incubate inside the nest for 12 days, and the young fledge within three weeks after hatching.

Red-breasted Nuthatches can be lured to backyard feeders with suet or sunflower seeds. Or head into one of the Bay Area's dense coniferous forests this spring to look and listen.